



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 24 event to connect restaurants, farmers for 'eat local' challenge

Central Louisiana is preparing for its first “eat local” challenge by connecting local restaurants with farmers. The introductions will take place May 24 before the Alexandria Mid-Week Farmers Market and pave the way for the June challenge, which will encourage Central Louisiana residents and businesses to buy fresh, nutritious food that comes from the region.

The Fresh Central #askwhatslocal Challenge begins June 1. Restaurant owners and employees who want to participate are asked to stop by the farmers market at the First United Methodist Church-Alexandria parking lot at 2727 Jackson St. from 2-3 p.m. on Tuesday, May 24. The mid-week market runs from 3-6 p.m.

“We are inviting all restaurants to come and meet our local farmers, see what types of food they have available and to form working partnerships,” said Kinsie Rayburn, the Farm to Table Coordinator for the Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance. “We want to connect farmers with as many Central Louisiana restaurants as possible to give people more local food options when the challenge begins.”

Connecting farmers with local restaurants and encouraging residents to buy local food is one of the goals of the Central Louisiana Local Foods Initiative. Administered by CLEDA, the Initiative is a community effort that aims to strengthen Central Louisiana’s local foods economy while increasing access to fresh foods for all residents of the region. It was created in 2012 with a Challenge for a Healthier Louisiana Grant from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation of Louisiana and matching funding from The Rapides Foundation.

The Fresh Central #askwhatslocal Challenge is intended to persuade Central Louisiana residents and businesses to spend their dollars on food that comes from local farms and producers. In a 2013 study on the local food economy, economist Ken Meter concluded that if each household spent just \$5 a week on food grown within the nine-parish Central Louisiana region, the region’s farmers would retain over \$91 million annually.

“The impact of buying local cannot be underestimated,” said CLEDA President Jim Clinton. “Locally sourcing your food purchases keeps more money in the region, gives people a better understanding of seasonal availability, and provides a stronger link to the community.”

The challenge will be held throughout the month of June and award prizes to residents and businesses that focus on buying local. Residents will be able to earn points for choosing restaurants that use local ingredients, asking “what’s local” at grocery stores, going to farmers markets and participating in the various #askwhatslocal events that will be scheduled in June. Businesses will be able to earn points by catering meals that are locally sourced.

CLEDA will support participating restaurants with social media marketing throughout the month.

Restaurants interesting in participating or being connected with regional farmers can sign up at Freshcentral.org or contact Rayburn at (318) 441-3408 or krayburn@cenla.org.

The Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance (CLEDA) is an organization which consists of the economic development entities from the parishes (counties) of Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon and Winn. The mission of the Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance is to help people prosper in vibrant, thriving communities.

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation is building a healthier Louisiana through community outreach and charitable giving. In addition to the Challenge for a Healthier Louisiana, the Foundation has two signature programs: The Angel Award®, an annual recognition of outstanding Louisiana volunteers who improve the quality of life for at-risk children, and Smart Bodies®, a school-based program to prevent childhood obesity. Blue Cross also contributes nearly \$2 million annually to various nonprofit organizations throughout the state that contribute to health, education and the overall quality of life in Louisiana communities. The Foundation is funded solely through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana.

The Rapides Foundation is a philanthropic organization that develops initiatives and provides grants to organizations that share the Foundation's mission to improve the health status of Central Louisiana. The Foundation's service area consists of Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon and Winn parishes.

Media Contact:

Kinsie Rayburn
Farm to Table Coordinator
Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance
(318) 441-3408

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